THE STAR'S PART IN THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF WASHINGTON.

By G. A. LYON, Jr.

The paramount principle for which The Star has always stood is the development of Washington as a national city, its complete evolution as the capital of the republic. For fifty years this purpose has animated the newspaper in its conduct of its own affairs, in the publication of the news and the utterance of editorial views. Never swerving, never retrogressing, The Star has urged throughout its career that here lay both a possibility and a duty for the people of the whole United States. Under some circumstances such a course would mean the production of a "local" paper in the narrowest sense of the word. But there is only one District of Columbia in the country, only one, indeed, in the world, and that area stands unique in character as expressing a great national idea. National concerns are local in the nation's city.

Thus it is that The Star as a factor in the upbuilding of the federal capital has appealed to the broadest spirit of progressive Americanism by pointing out the way to the creation here, in the execution of the plans of the founders, of a grand city, in itself a patrfotic inspiration. Nations are judged by their capitals from the foreign point of view, and it is recorded in history that in the early days of the republic only the restraint of diplomacy or of a charitable kindness prevented open old world scoffing at the poor beginning which was dubbed officially the seat of American government. Yet wise visitors in those struggling days of "magnificent distances" recognized not only the handicaps of national youth and poverty, but the excellence of the implanted idea.

Creating a Capital.

It was a large undertaking for the young nation to build a capital out of raw material. But it was characteristic of the spirit which had just formulated and enforced a new principle of government. It is unnecessary in this connection to enter into a description or a discussion of the causes which led to the compromise establishing the seat of government on the farm-lined banks of the Potomac, or of the early history of that enterprise, marked by many failures, by the almost immediate lapse from the original project, and by years of struggle and disappointment. Taking Washington as The Star found it in 1852, with unkempt streets and scattered buildings, and following the capital's career from then through the half century to today, there stands a record of harder struggles than any that had preceded. For up to 1852, and, indeed, for some years following, Washington was a negligible quantity, a mere place for the transaction of necessary national business, retained because of a certain reverence for the law and, perhaps more pointedly, for the millions of public money invested in irremovable structures. Washington could hardly be regarded then as a national city It lacked form and prestige and enterprise. Its citizens were discouraged and inert. Its relations to the federal government were vague and unsatisfactory. To its few permanent residents they were burdensome. The government had brought the city into being and had then left it to shift for itself without having given it the means of maintenance. The largest owner of real estate, it paid no taxes and withheld from the local taxpayers a practicable method of government. Deeper and deeper became the despair of the citizens as their debts grew, their unperformed municipal duties accumulated and their indifferent pseudo partner continued to remain silent, when activity would help, or to act only when action was a hindrance.

The War's Influence.

For the first few years of its life The Star, while doing all that lay within its power to better the condition of the capital, was too much engrossed in its own establishment and self-preservation to become much of a factor in the great task which lay before the inert people and their recreant political guardians. It is doubtful whether the time was then ripe for even the most powerful newspaper organ to break the lassitude of decades. Grave issues confronted the nation. The slavery question was of too great importance to the very life of the Union to permit the solution of the District's problem. Mutterings of war between the states caused conservative men to wonder, indeed, whether the United States would require a central federal city in the future. The possibility of secession opened up a long vista of disintegrating changes which would eliminate the District as a national quantity. The war did come and with it a great influx of visitors to Washington. Americans who had thought of the District as a meeting point for Congress and a temporary abiding place for their officials, when they came here to attend to matters connected with the great struggle, were surprised to find a considerable city of permanent residents, not connected with government and maintaining in a really creditable style a much larger establishment than the meager business and manufacturing warranted. The war developed the national conception of a federal city as it had never been made apparent to the people before. It exposed, too, the insufficiency of the equipment, and the thought came, perhaps unconsciously, to many thousands that the District had been neglected.

In Time of Peace

After the war, with peace declared and the sections knitting together and the union principle established forever, Washington assumed a new meaning to the people. It symbolized the preservation of the republic from dissolution. The assassination of Lincoln drew the keen, painful, tearful attention of millions upon the District. The capital had become as a place dedicated to a great memory. The Star, then in its second decade, began to point to this new significance. The Washington idea was developing. Yet there were continuing difficulties. The old unsatisfactory state of local government remained uncured. The process of national reconstruction was as absorbing of the time and thought of the national legislators as the problems of slavery and of war had been. It was not until 1870 that Congress seemed to wake to a realizing sense of the wretched state to which the municipality had been brought by neglect.

Washington in 1870.

An excellent picture of Washington in the early part of 1870, affording a contrast with the Washington of today, is to be had from a reading of some of the editorials in The Star, published during the discussion of projects for a new form of government for the national capital. In the issue of January 17, 1870, The Star said:

"The enlargement of the powers of the District government is really the vital part of the (proposed) bill. Any change in the mode of government here is worthless if it does not secure this feature. It is not that our officials are corrupt or inefficient that the affairs of the District are in their present unsatisfactory condition, but it is in the fact that with their present limited powers they can do absolutely nothing. It is not their fault, nor that of the people, that our avenues remain unpaved; that the canal is useless and pestiferous; that the old market sheds disgrace Pennsylvania avenue, and that Pennsylvania avenue disgraces the city, or rather the government. It is not the fault of the authorities or the people of the District that the wretched old jail blights the center of the city; that the river channel is filled up, and that the miasmatic flats south of the President's house are not filled up. It is not their fault that we have no railroad facilities, do not own a foot of rail or a single board or brick in any railroad structures. It is not their fault that a check is put upon industry and enterprise by fossil laws received as a legacy from Maryland, and which that state has long ago repealed for itself but which still remain an incubus upon the District, because Congress has not time to deal with them.

"In all these matters the District would very speedily work a reform if she had the power. But she cannot straighten a line in the ziz-zag canal, or touch a venerable shingle upon the moss-cover d roof of the market house, or fill up a rut in Pennsylvania avenue, or clean a gutter in front of a government reservation, or remove a spoonful of the sacred soil of the river flats, or subscribe a dollar to build railroads, or for an industrial exposition, or to encourage manufactures, or any work of progress, without the consent of Congress."

The Territorial Government Bill.

At this time The Star had found a few sturdy friends of the District in Congress, men who believed in its possibilities and thought they should be developed as a token of the nation's power and progress. Among these was Senator Hamlin of Maine, former Vice President, a stanch advocate of nationalizing Washington. He prepared a bill for the organization of a territorial form of government for the District as a cure for the manifest evils which then cried aloud for correction. He was berated and insulted by politician-led mobs. His measure was denounced as an attempt to rob the people of the franchise. The Star sought to point the way more clearly to the citizens of Washington. It saw in Mr. Hamlin's bill a chance to escape from intolerable conditions, and it pleaded for its fair consideration and denounced the hoodlum methods which a few noisy people, more or less interested in preserving the wretched state as it existed, had practiced in order to prevent a fair expression of the views of the people of the District. Its twenty years of increasing success gave The Star a prestige in this affair which had its unquestionable influence, and in 1871 the territorial form of government was adopted for the District. Imperfect though that method was, and speedily though it was displaced, it was an improvement over the old days of municipal inability and stagnation and a step toward the goal of a genuine partnership between the District and the government. Best of all, it led to the work of Alexander R. Shepherd, who in a few sharp strokes compensated for many years of neglect and idleness.

Alexander R. Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd was a part owner of The Star when the territorial government bill became a law. He had always sympathized with the desires of its other owners to break loose the shackles binding the capital fast. Progressive, ardent, impatient of the restraint of obsolete laws and customs, and great enough to loom so high above the heads of others that he could see far into the future, Mr. Shepherd was the ideal man to take a leading part in local government at that important juncture. The Star supported him in his great enterprises, both as a member of the first board of public works and later as governor, not only on personal grounds or because of his late business relations with its proprietors, but because it recognized that the man and the hour had met. Washington sorely needed a champion then. The newspaper could and did create public sentiment in favor of reform, both in the District and in Congress, but the crying need of the time was an executive fearless and resourceful. The Star believed that Alexander R. Shepherd was that man, and continued to support his program of capital making. What L'Enfant planned and George Washington approved Shepherd tried to the limit of local means to develop and perfect. The work was too great for one man to accomplish alone, even if he had the hearty approval of an awakened community and an intelligently co-operative Congress. For what Shepherd found to do, and did in part, was mere foundation making, the clearing away of rubbish, the cleaning up of the partly used and badly neglected original site for the capital. He could not create parks nor erect public buildings, but he could raze illegal rookeries and oust squatters and cut down embankments to make way for streets and avenues and so afford the straining city a chance to grow under its new impulse, given to it by the war. And during all that grand work of preparing the field for future capital makers The Star saw the meaning of the process and upheld Shepherd's hands and besought the people to have patience even when the great enterprise began to add seriously to the burden of the citizen. For, The Star believed, it was evident that if the mountain of government would not come to the District Mahomet, the Mahomet must go to the mountain. If Congress held Washington in such light esteem as to deem it unworthy of aid and ideal government, it behooved Washington to make of itself so fine a city that Congress would ultimately in very pride take it into its guardianship.

VIEW OF EAST FRONT OF THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL.

Evolution of the District.

The territorial government failed in one sense, but it succeeded in another. It did not prove to be the form of administration best suited to so peculiar a jurisdiction and it was quickly displaced. But it did precipitate the tardy assumption by the government of its legitimate obligations toward the capital. Again The Star was at the front urging this act of righteousness, pointing to the long years of shameful neglect and to the indebtedness incurred in the District's effort to make itself worthy of the nation whose capital it was. It favored the commissionership form of administration and the abolition of the suffrage. It shed no tears at the spectacle of American citizens deprived of their votes. It recognized in the fiscal terms of the "organic act" of 1878, which supplemented the legislation of 1874, placing the District under three commissioners, whereby the government undertook to meet every dollar of local tax money with a federal dollar, not only a respite from perpetually threatening bankruptcy, but a means to the end of untold future developments.

An Ideal System.

In short, The Star saw in the plan which was finally perfected by the law of 1878 an ideal system of government for a community situated as was Washington, and it